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Management as a Liberal Art (Seattle)

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Recommended Citation

Pollard, C. William, "Management as a Liberal Art (Seattle)" (2013). *C. William Pollard Papers*. 158.
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Opening Remarks for Seminar on Management as a Liberal Art
Seattle Pacific University
Taped August 23, 2013
C. William Pollard

First of all, I want to thank you for taking this time to reflect upon the role of our Christian faith and the doing of business. As you do so, you will have the opportunity to consider the excellent work by Joe Maciariello and Karen Linkletter entitled *Drucker's Lost Art of Management* and Jeff Van Duzer's book *Why Business Matters to God*.

As you are meeting today, I will be traveling in Europe, concluding my trip with a visit to one of your sister institutions Emanuel University in Oradea, Romania. I will be working especially with the Business School faculty there discussing issues and opportunities relating to the integration of the claims of our faith with the demands of our work in the marketplace.

Question One: Why management as a liberal art

This term came from the pen of Peter Drucker. He used it to emphasize the reality that as we work in organizations to lead and manage, we are not leading and managing things – we are leading and managing people.

To be effective in doing so, Peter said we should seek to understand what makes up the human condition. Who are we? Where did we come from? Where are we going? Does our work contribute or detract to the person we are becoming?

In answering these questions, Peter concluded that we need to draw upon the knowledge and insights of the humanities and social sciences – a liberal arts curriculum which would include philosophy, history, literature, psychology, and anthropology. In saying this he also noted that it was important to recognize that there was a spiritual dimension to our human condition - the genesis for our character development.

In so doing Drucker, in his own way, was raising the question of God and the need for a person's response to that question in assuming the role of a manager. It is a question that does not, nor should it, demand a uniform corporate response. But it does require an individual response and the understanding of one's source of authority

in determining moral behavior and the treatment of people as the subject of work not just the object of work.

Question Two: Who is Peter Drucker?

Drucker is often referred to as the Father of Modern Day Management. He wrote over thirty books on management and leadership. I had the privilege of knowing and working with Peter as a friend, advisor, and mentor.

In his journey of faith and decision to become a Christian, he was greatly influenced by the writings of Soren Kierkegaard. In his essay titled "The Unfashionable Kierkegaard," he comments on his recognition that we are "imperfect, weak, sinners and yet made in God's image responsible for our actions." He goes on to say that "our human existence is possible as existence not in despair, as existence not in tragedy, but is possible as existence in faith. That faith is the belief that in God the impossible is possible, that in Him time and eternity are one, that both life and death are meaningful. Faith is the knowledge that man is a creature – not autonomous, not the master, not the end, not the center, yet responsible and free."

Question Three: How did you work out these things at ServiceMaster?

At ServiceMaster, we decided to be overt about the issue of raising the question of God and did so in our mission statement.

Our corporate objectives were simply stated: To honor God in all we do; To help people develop; To pursue excellence; and To grow profitably. Those first two objectives were end goals, the second two were means goals.

We did not use the first objective as a basis for exclusion. It was, in fact, the reason for our promotion of diversity as we recognized that different people with different beliefs were all part of the world that God so loved.

As a business firm, we wanted to excel at generating profits and creating value for our shareholders. If we didn't want to play by these rules, we didn't belong in the ballgame. But also, we tried to encourage an environment where the workplace could be an open community where the question of the person's moral and spiritual development and the existence of God and how one related the claims of his or her faith with their work were issues of discussion, debate, and yes, even learning and understanding. We considered the people of our firm as, in fact, the soul of the firm.

It did not mean that everything was done right. We experienced our share of mistakes. We sometimes failed and did things wrong, but because of a stated standard and reason for that standard, we could not hide our mistakes. Mistakes were regularly flushed out in the open for correction and, in some cases for forgiveness and leaders could not protect themselves at the expense of those they were leading.

The process of seeking understanding and application of these objectives at all levels of the organization was a never-ending task. It involved matters of the heart as well as the head and it was not susceptible to standard management techniques of implementation and measurement. While at times it was discouraging, it also was energizing as one realized the continuing potential for creativity, innovation, and growth as there was a focus on the development of the whole person.

It was about developing a person's skills and talents but also dealt with the development of a person's character and the encouragement of a spirit of giving back and putting the interest of others ahead of their own interest. To be involved in who people were becoming in their work environment, not just what they were doing and how they did it. Three examples:

- a. Olga and Nisha
- b. The posture of indebtedness of a leader
- c. The Harvard case study
- d. The story of hubris

Question Four: Why is this topic important in shaping the curriculum in management education?

When I assumed the leadership of the firm in the early 1980s, I had the privilege of building on the rich legacy of my predecessors, starting with our founder Marion Wade, then Ken Hansen, and then my immediate predecessor Ken Wessner. Each in their own way saw business and their work in the firm as a ministry and calling of God. Marion Wade used to put it this way: "I can't leave God in the pew on Sunday; I have to bring him with me to work on Monday. It is my ministry."

Is this a generally accepted view today? When was the last time you heard a sermon on business as a ministry or the market place as a calling of God or hear someone publicly praying for the ministry of people in business? Is this subject foreign to the way we do church or to the culture of our faith?

Listen to this letter I received from a graduate of a Christian college. It reflects what may be some common understandings or misunderstandings of how God works and calls us to a purposeful life.

The student starts out by saying:

"I am very happy to report that, by God's grace and fullness, I actually did graduate. For the first time since age five, I am not a student.

"It's been a good four years of learning. I was an English major and a Bible minor. I can now read in the Greek New Testament. I know phrases like: inaugurated eschatology and hermeneutical fallacy. My interpretation of scripture has increased in both caution and confidence.

"I have made wonderful friends here, in breakfast Bible studies and noon prayer sessions for missions, in afternoons in the fall playing football and in the spring playing baseball, and late nights in the dorm having fun. The farewells will be very difficult.

"So, what's next? I am moving to Kansas City where I will be closer to my family. I'll find a job and pay off my student loans. What kind of a job? I really don't know – construction work or some type of administrative work for a business? I also will apply to various mission agencies. I feel called to the mission field and, in a year or two, I hope to be in full-time Christian service. Where, I don't know. Ethiopia? Papua New Guinea? India? I will wait for God's call to the right place.

"Please pray for me in the next couple of months. It is going to be quite a transition and, frankly, **I am not looking forward to it.** For the first time, I am leaving a Christian community to live among **ordinary, working Americans.** I am expecting a considerable amount of uncertainty and loneliness, but I hope to develop some friends at the local church I will be attending."

So, what is this student saying? Could it be that his view is representative of a common understanding of "Calling" within our evangelical culture?

Is there some form of hierarchy in God's calling with a special place for what people often refer to as "full-time Christian service?" Will we somehow miss out if we

don't do something that fits into this category? Should we think of God's call in the context of a location or special place of service? Is it only about what we should do and the place where we should do it or is it more about who we are and who we are becoming in our relationship with God? And by the way, where does ordinary work with those ordinary people fit in -- the ordinary people that God so loves and for whom Jesus died?

For me, the world of business has become an integral part of God's calling. It has become a channel of distribution for fulfilling and living my faith; a channel that has reached from a janitor's closet in Saudi Arabia to the Great Hall of the People in Beijing, China -- from sweeping streets in Osaka, Japan to ringing the bell of the New York Stock Exchange. The marketplace has provided a wonderful opportunity for me to embrace and engage those who do not believe the way I do, but whom God loves and who, by my words and actions, should see the reality of His love.

Can godly and Christian values make a difference in the way a business is led or the way a leader performs his or her responsibilities? You bet they can. Creating cultures of character requires leaders to know what they believe and why they believe it; to seek truth; to know their source of moral authority and to know what is right even when there is no code of conduct. The global market place provides a wonderful opportunity for followers of Jesus Christ to live and share their faith. There is a common language of performance in the market that **crosses** secular, cultural, and religious barriers. When there is performance people listen. And yes, as some people listen they respond to the redemptive message of God's love.

God has called each of us to be in the world but not part of it. He has called us to be excellent in what we do, whether we call it a job, profession, or ministry, and when we excel in what we do, whatever that may be, as a lawyer, business person, minister, or educator, and live our faith in a way that cannot be ignored or contained, we have the platform to proclaim and share our faith. The choice is ours.

How then are we preparing our young people in Christian higher education to view their future work in business as a calling of God? Will they become a vehicle for use by God to help the people they work with to find a relationship with Him? Will they understand how to raise the question of God in the workplace in a way that affirms their faith but not imposes it? As they will be assuming management and leadership roles in business, will they not only get the right things done through others but also

assume the responsibility for the development of the whole person and who they are becoming in their work? Should we be teaching management as a liberal art?

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Revised 8/15/2013